

# FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

August 2016

Idaho Falls Department of Parks & Recreation

## Acknowledgments

The Idaho Falls Zoo (IFZ) Five-Year Strategic Plan is the culmination of lots of hard work by many dedicated people and the input of more than 1,000 people. The Idaho Falls Zoo team would like to thank the Honorable Mayor Rebecca Casper and City Council President Thomas Hally, as well as the entire City Council, for their support and encouragement. Additionally, staff would like to thank the devoted Tautphaus Park Zoological Society staff and board members for their dedication and commitment to improving the Idaho Falls Zoo for present and future generations. We are particularly grateful to former IF Zoo Superintendent Bill Gresonde, long-time zoo staff member Linda Beard, Mayors Tom Cambell and Linda Milam, former Council members Ida Hardcastle and Karen Cornwell, and other former zoo staff and volunteers who were instrumental in the development of the zoo we enjoy today.

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# I. About the Five-Year Strategic Plan



## Why Does the Zoo Need a Five-Year Plan?

While IFZ is among the most beloved and well used attractions in the region, the IFZ is only beginning to glimpse its tremendous potential as a community asset. Evaluation and development of a clear path forward is the most effective way of ensuring continued positive progress towards realizing that potential - in other words the IFZ needs a strategic plan. Both AZA accreditation reviews and the Mayor's Citizen Review Committee concluded that the strategic plan would be a great benefit to the IFZ.

With a focused effort toward a common vision, IFZ staff and the community can more effectively partner to create an increasingly influential and dynamic zoo that is more financially viable, a more valuable educational and entertainment asset, has an increased impact on the local economy, and inspires active participation in creating a healthy future for wildlife.



## Guiding Principles, Goals & Objectives of the Five-Year Strategic Plan

Input from public, visitors, stakeholders, staff, volunteers, and city officials was the single most important factor in the development of this Five-Year Strategic Plan. All conclusions and recommendations directly reflect community input on what the IFZ does well, what needs to improve, and what should happen over the coming five years.

This input was used to identify:

1. Current assets and limitations of IFZ;
2. General Areas of Priority that build upon those assets and address limitations;
3. Objectives to be addressed within each Area of Priority;
4. Specific Recommendations under each objective that can be successfully accomplished within the coming five years. This provides a guide to what needs to be done and what can realistically be accomplished to achieve the maximum success possible.



## Soliciting Community Input

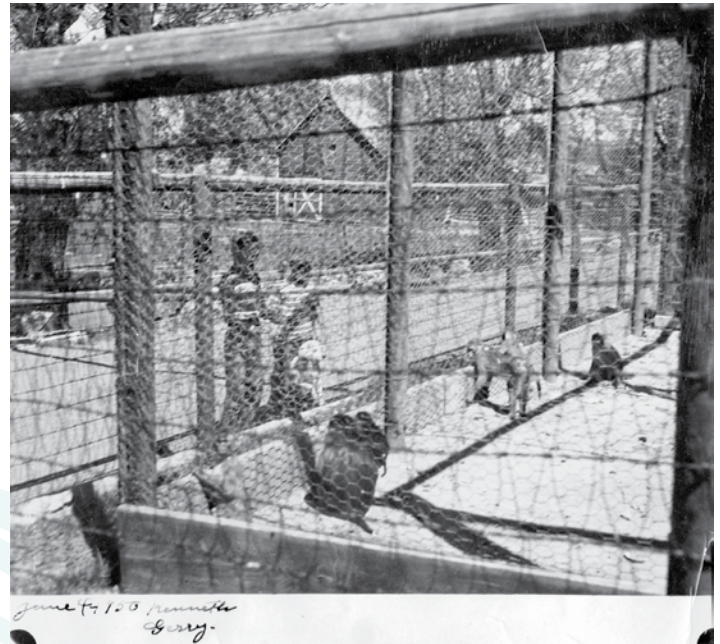
A survey was developed and administered to more than 1,000 IFZ patrons during the 2015 zoo season. A second series of questions was developed for private interviews with zoo staff, volunteers, Tautphaus Park Zoological Society board members, members of the Idaho Falls City Council and Mayor. Input received was grouped into categories based on reoccurring themes and Areas of Priority were identified based on those groupings. Individual objectives and recommendations were also developed based on the results of these surveys and questionnaires.



## II. History and Impact of the Idaho Falls Zoo

### Thirty Years Ago the Zoo was Close to Being Closed Down

The IFZ began in 1935 when animals were moved from Highland and Sportsman's parks (originally the private collection of the Heslop family) to Tautphaus Park into animal facilities built as a Works Progress Administration project with matching funds from the City of Idaho Falls. After serving the community for more than 40 years, growing concern for declining conditions and outdated facilities began to generate letters to the editor and discussions at City Council meetings (City Council Minutes 5/10/1979). By 1985, letters to the editor criticizing conditions at the zoo were common, petitions were presented to the City Council "requesting zoo improvements or closure" (City Council Minutes 6/20/1985, 5/9/1985), and complaints submitted to the U.S. Humane Society resulted in a well publicized inspection with unflattering conclusions that included that the zoo be brought up to acceptable standards or closed down (Post Register April 25, 1985; Post Register June 19, 1985; Spokane Review January 14, 1985). If the city was to get out of the zoo business, now was the time.



*Idaho Falls Zoo, 1950*

**In 1985, the U.S. Humane Society concluded that the zoo be brought up to acceptable standards or closed down.**

**If the city was to get out of the zoo business, now was the time.**



*Mayor Eddie Petersen viewing animals in Sportsman's Park, 1934*

### Public and Private Investment Resulted in an Extraordinary Transformation

The city did not get out of the zoo business. Instead of avoiding significant financial investment required for improvements by just closing the zoo, the city began building a powerful public/private partnership for the dramatic transformation of the zoo. A Zoo Improvement Committee was appointed, a long-term plan was developed, a private "Friends of the Zoo" was formed and a formal resolution was passed by the City Council to

"fully and completely support the efforts of the Friends of the Zoo and other public-minded individuals to develop, improve, upgrade, and otherwise render more attractive the Idaho Falls Public Zoo" (City Council Minutes 5/23/1985).

The City moved forward with improvements and a philosophy that "only when groups and individuals see the City is serious about improvements at the zoo, will private



money become available to help us” (City Council Minutes 1/9/1986). A zoo entrance fee was charged for the first time to help with improvements. As planned, the community responded to city government efforts with donations of every size from a \$13.68 donation from a Cub Scout Pack to \$500k given by the ALSAM Foundation. To this day, the TPZS raises tens of thousands of dollars each year for the benefit of IFZ.

The public/private partnership paid off in a big way. The transformation of IFZ from ready to be closed down embarrassment into the “Best Little Zoo in the West” is a source of great community pride. Just 13 years after the US Humane Society suggested the zoo be closed down, IFZ became the first zoo in Idaho to receive accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the highest recognition of quality animal care and zoo management. For 18 years, IFZ has maintained this distinction with AZA inspections ensuring rigorous professional standards. According to the AZA website, fewer than 10% of US animal exhibitors are AZA accredited. While many find it surprising to find a zoo of the quality of IFZ in a small city in eastern Idaho, to the citizens of Idaho Falls the IFZ is representative of our extraordinary and surprising community and its exceptional quality of life.



## IFZ was a Good Investment

### The Zoo is Among the Most Highly Used Attractions in Eastern Idaho

On average the IFZ hosts 123,000 visitors each year. This is more than double (211%) of the entire population of Idaho Falls (population=58,691) and 119% of the entire population of Bonneville County (population=104,234). What makes this attendance all the more remarkable is that the IFZ is open only about six months each year. According to patron surveys, 37% of these visitors are citizens of the Idaho Falls area (47,717 visitors annually on average or 81% of the population of Idaho Falls). By saving the zoo from closure and investing in improvements, the community has created a resource that touches the lives of a very large number of people, impacts a large majority of the citizens of Idaho Falls, and will do so for generations. At the writing of this report (July 2016), IFZ is on track for another very busy, possibly record breaking year for attendance.





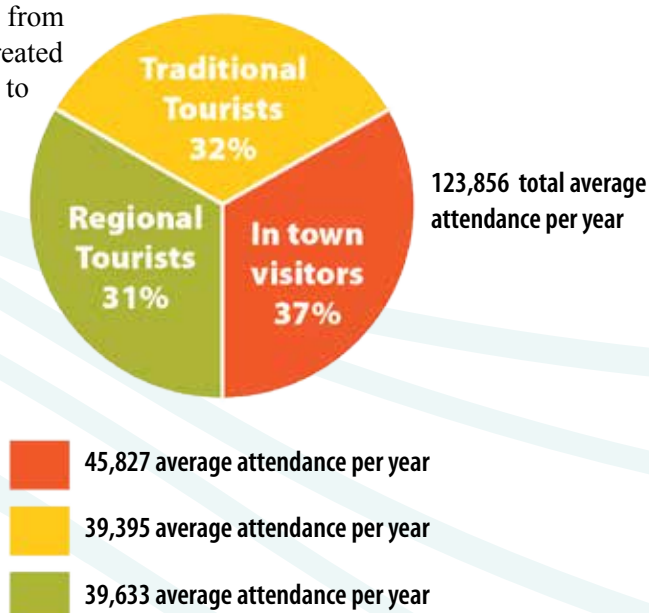
## IFZ was a Good Investment

### The Zoo is a Major Attractor of Visitors to Idaho Falls

According to patron surveys, 63% of zoo visitors come from outside of the Idaho Falls area to visit IFZ (79,787 annual visitors on average or 135% of the population of Idaho Falls). This establishes IFZ as among the most important tourist attractions of the city. The zoo has achieved this success with very minimal marketing efforts.

These out-of-town visitors to the zoo come from two important but separate tourist markets. On average, 31% of annual zoo visitors are regional tourists that come from within 100 miles of Idaho Falls but are not from Idaho Falls (39,053 on average every year). Another 32% (40,734 on average every year) are traditional tourists that come from more than 100 miles away. By saving the IFZ from closure and investing in improvements, the community has created a major tourist attraction that brings large numbers of visitors to our community.

Every dollar invested by the City of Idaho Falls in IFZ is returned four times over in economic impact.



## IFZ was a Good Investment

### The Zoo has a Significant Impact on the Local Economy

Because the IFZ attracts such a large number of visitors and their pocketbooks to Idaho Falls, the zoo has a significant positive impact on the local economy. An independent study (2009-2010) using visitor surveys conducted at the IFZ concluded that the IFZ adds \$3.54 million dollars of impact to the local economy every year. Every dollar invested by the City of Idaho Falls, the report concludes, is returned four times over in economic impact. This finding is in keeping with other studies on the economic impact of zoos across the country.

According to a study conducted by the nationally recognized economist Stephen Fuller, for example, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums across the country generate \$16 billion in economic activity every year. Zoos attract 179 million visitors annually which is more than the National Football League, National Hockey League, and Major League Baseball combined. By saving the zoo from closure and investing in improvements, the community has created an amenity that not only serves the community but also contributes significantly to the vitality of the local economy.





## IFZ was a Good Investment

### The Zoo is an Educational Resource for the Entire Region

On average, the IFZ sees more than 7,000 school children on organized school tours from throughout the region every year. For example, in less than four months of 2016 (April 9 to July 19), the IFZ hosted more than 7,700 school children from 31 communities in 12 counties across Idaho and from cities in southwestern Montana and western Wyoming. The IFZ provides an educational resource that is unique in the region. Animals representing more than 140 species from six continents offers a multitude of opportunities to learn about the world we live in. By saving the zoo from closure and investing in improvements, the community has created a unique educational resource that is used eagerly by educators from Idaho Falls and throughout the region.

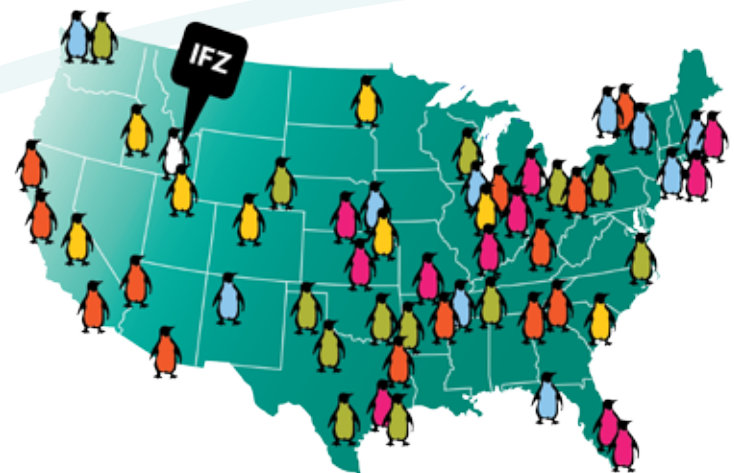


## IFZ was a Good Investment

### The Zoo has a Real Conservation Impact

Only seven years after the US Humane Society suggested the zoo be closed down, IFZ was approved to participate in the Species Survival Plan (SSP) for the endangered snow leopard. The zoo's conservation programs to preserve and propagate threatened and endangered wildlife has grown and developed to such an extent that the AZA accreditation review concluded: "The zoo is to be highly commended for participating in 45 species management programs-34% of its total species holdings". Individuals of endangered species born at the IFZ are now in institutions participating in SSP programs across the country and in Canada.

In 2015, IFZ initiated a new "Quarters for Conservation" program where zoo visitors paid a \$0.25 contribution as part of their entrance fee to support local and global conservation initiatives. IFZ visitors are able to choose where their money goes between conservation projects identified by the zoo. In the first year this program raised \$11,000 for a regional wolverine monitoring project, the Snow Leopard Trust, Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), and the Gorongosa Restoration Project in Mozambique. In 2016, the program contribution was increased to \$0.50. By saving the zoo from closure and investing in improvements, the community has created an organization that has a significant impact on the conservation of the world's endangered wildlife.



Snow Leopard



Ring-tailed Lemur



Plains Zebra



African Penguin



Other Primates







## IFZ was a Good Investment

### The Public/Private Partnership Continues to Have an Impact Today

City efforts to improve and maintain the zoo have always been done in partnership with the private sector.

### TPZS and Other Zoo Support Organizations

As early as 1979, a Zoological Society was formed and in 1985 a Friends of the IFZ was organized and began raising money to benefit the IFZ. The Tautphaus Park Zoological Society (TPZS), a 501(c)3 support organization, was created in 1992 to assist the city with fund-raising, developing and expanding the zoo, and increasing public awareness and support for the zoo and its conservation/education goals. Since their inception, the TPZS has sponsored fund-raisers and special events to generate moneys for zoo improvement and programs. For example, more than \$230,000 has been raised by the TPZS to date, for the building of a new education complex.

### Volunteers

The public/private partnership goes far beyond fundraising. The IFZ staff is augmented by thousands of hours of volunteer service every year. Every day, education, keeper support, technical assistance, event management, visitor services, exhibit repair, and much more are augmented significantly by volunteers. The IFZ would have difficulty operating without volunteers. For the calendar year of 2015, for example, IFZ received 12,729 hours of volunteer service. Placing the federal rate for volunteer value of \$22.55 p/hour for these services, this is equivalent of \$287,039 worth of labor donated by the community.

By saving the IFZ from closure and investing in improvements, the community has created a productive public/private collaboration that has a significant impact on the quality of life in our community and the educational and recreational opportunities available for our citizens.



### III. General Findings

The following general themes were drawn from the input received through more than 1,000 patron surveys and interviews with zoo staff, supporters, volunteers, TPZS board members, and city officials.



#### What is the Purpose of the Zoo?

- **Education:** Face to face encounters with a diverse collection of animals from around the world is a unique educational opportunity for eastern Idaho and very valuable educational asset.
- **Entertainment/Recreation:** Providing a fun, dynamic, interactive, and family friendly experience is important for the IFZ and greatly enhances the zoo's ability to attract and educate visitors.
- **Conservation:** Being a positive force for the health and conservation of wildlife populations is important for a facility that houses and exhibits wild animals, many of which are species that are endangered.



#### What Does IFZ do Well?

- **Great Collection of Well Cared for Animals:** The AZA accredited IFZ maintains a wonderful collection of more than 350 animals representing 122 species, 45 of which are monitored under Species Survival Programs.
- **Passionate, Well Trained and Dedicated Staff:** The quality staff that ensures the quality of the zoo and the high standard of animal care is a source of pride for everyone associated with the IFZ.
- **Patrons Love the Experience they have at IFZ:** The strongest conclusion from all surveys and interviews was the extremely positive feelings that everyone has for IFZ and the experience that they have there.



#### What Needs to be Improved?

- **IFZ is not Seen as a Dynamic, Interactive, Educational Experience:** While IFZ is considered as a wonderfully pleasant, family friendly place to view animals, it is not considered a dynamic, interactive place to learn about animals and the conservation challenges they face.
- **IFZ is Perceived as Being Stale:** While visitors love the animals, they feel that interactive opportunities are limited and are not impressed with the variety or quality of exhibits. The zoo seems stale. New exhibits, temporary changing exhibits, upgraded exhibits, anything new is the most clear message from patrons comments.
- **IFZ Can Attract More Visitors:** While attendance is very healthy, IFZ has a great potential to broaden the demographic of its visitors and be more effective at attracting tourists. The IFZ has a great opportunity to increase its attendance.
- **IFZ Basic Operational Infrastructure Needs Strengthening:** For example, limitations in size and organization of staff, minimal fundraising and marketing, little planning and unexploited opportunities to bolster financial viability need attention and improvement.

#### TPZ By the Numbers

99% of respondents  
"Would recommend the  
IFZ to a friend."

75% of zoo visitors  
"Strongly Agree" that the IFZ  
is a fun place to see animals

73% of zoo visitors  
"Strongly Agree" that the IFZ  
is a fun place to go with family  
and friends

But

Only 36% of visitors  
gave the IFZ an "Excellent"  
ranking in educational value

Only 35% of visitors  
gave the IFZ an "Excellent"  
ranking in increasing  
conservation awareness

Only 39% of visitors  
gave IFZ an "Excellent"  
ranking in quality of animal  
exhibits

Only 35% of visitors  
gave IFZ an "Excellent"  
ranking in "Variety of Animal  
Exhibits"





## Conclusion: The IFZ Needs to Strengthen its Foundation and Increase its Impact

Visitors love the IFZ. Visitors and zoo staff agree that their positive experience seems to be about passive entertainment, a warm comfortable atmosphere that is pleasant for a family to spend time in. IFZ is not active entertainment where they have a dynamic meaningful interactions with animals, or are educated in some dynamic way that is also fun.

The IFZ needs a philosophical, programmatic, and physical transformation from a wonderful, relaxing experience for visitors to a dynamic, interactive experience that has a significant impact. This transformation needs to happen without losing the wonderful IFZ atmosphere or the base core of supporters that currently frequent the zoo. The IFZ needs to build on the current foundational assets to ensure that this transformation can happen efficiently and sustainably. The purpose of the zoo is to make something happen - recreation, conservation and education.

By increasing the impact, IFZ will better fulfill its mission, increase attendance, broaden geographic and demographic reach and attract more financial supporters. The zoo's attraction as a major tourism destination will increase as will the impact on the local economy. Everyone wins.

The IFZ needs a philosophical, programmatic, and physical transformation from a wonderful, relaxing experience for visitors to a dynamic, interactive, experience that has a significant impact.



## Areas of Priority

To develop a plan that builds upon assets and addresses limitations of IFZ, input from interviews and surveys was used to identify general Areas of Priority, objectives within each Area of Priority, and specific recommendations to achieve each objective. The Areas of Priority are as follows:

1. Strengthen the Foundation
2. Improve Visitor Experience
3. Conservation
4. Broaden the Reach
5. Maintain the Current Atmosphere and Accessibility of the Zoo



## AREA OF PRIORITY 1

# STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION

The single-most important thing IFZ can accomplish in the coming years is to strengthen itself as an organization. The foundational infrastructure needed to maintain the desired level of quality and provide the ability to improve needs to be reinforced.



## Area of Priority 1. Strengthen the Foundation

### Objective 1 Staffing

#### **Build and Maintain an Appropriate Sized, Passionate and Well Trained Paid and Volunteer Staff that Work Together as a Team to Accomplish Common Goals.**

The last several years have presented multiple unexpected challenges and the staff have responded admirably by foregoing vacations, working long hours, and applying their considerable talents. Staff reductions, increased work load, legal challenges, poor staff facilities, USDA inspections, and leadership changes have limited the staff's ability to function at the high level of which they are capable.

### Recommendations



#### **Immediately fill one zoo keeper position, elevate the part-time Vet Tech to a full-time vet Tech/Keeper and add a part-time Keeper.**

The Idaho Falls Mayor's Citizens Review Committee (CRC) recommended to "Fund additional animal keeper resources. Operating seven (7) days a week, year-round with just six (6) keepers leaves little margin for sick leave, vacation, training opportunities, volunteer coordination, enrichment time for the animals, possible enhanced hours of operation and increased public interaction." After citing examples of where animal care was less than optimum, recent USDA inspection concluded that IFZ: "must evaluate the current work load and staffing level and ensure that a sufficient number of adequately trained employees are utilized to maintain the professionally acceptable level of husbandry practices described in the regulations and standards." The hiring of one additional keeper position would bring the keeper staff back to 2014 levels. The immediate hiring of an additional keeper, elevating the part-time Vet Tech to a full-time Vet Tech/Keeper and add a part-time Keeper should be of the highest priority. The zoo staff is the single most critical factor in the current and continued success of the IFZ.



#### **Change staff organization from Superintendent, General Curator, Animal Care Supervisor to Executive Director, Operations Manager, General Curator.**

To better align with AZA job classification and to maintain the quality of the zoo and implement improvements, significant additional time will be required from the zoo's top executive position to raise the visibility of the IFZ in the community, seek out new funding sources, provide a vision for the staff and community to reach together, lead the staff to realizing that vision, build fundraising and marketing programs and relationship building and planning efforts - duties usually associated with an Executive Director rather than a Superintendent. This will require a staff member to increase oversight of daily operations at the zoo as an Operations Manager. As stated in the CRC report "Fill the Director position so he or she can address 'big picture' items such as strategic and long-range planning, fundraising, etc."

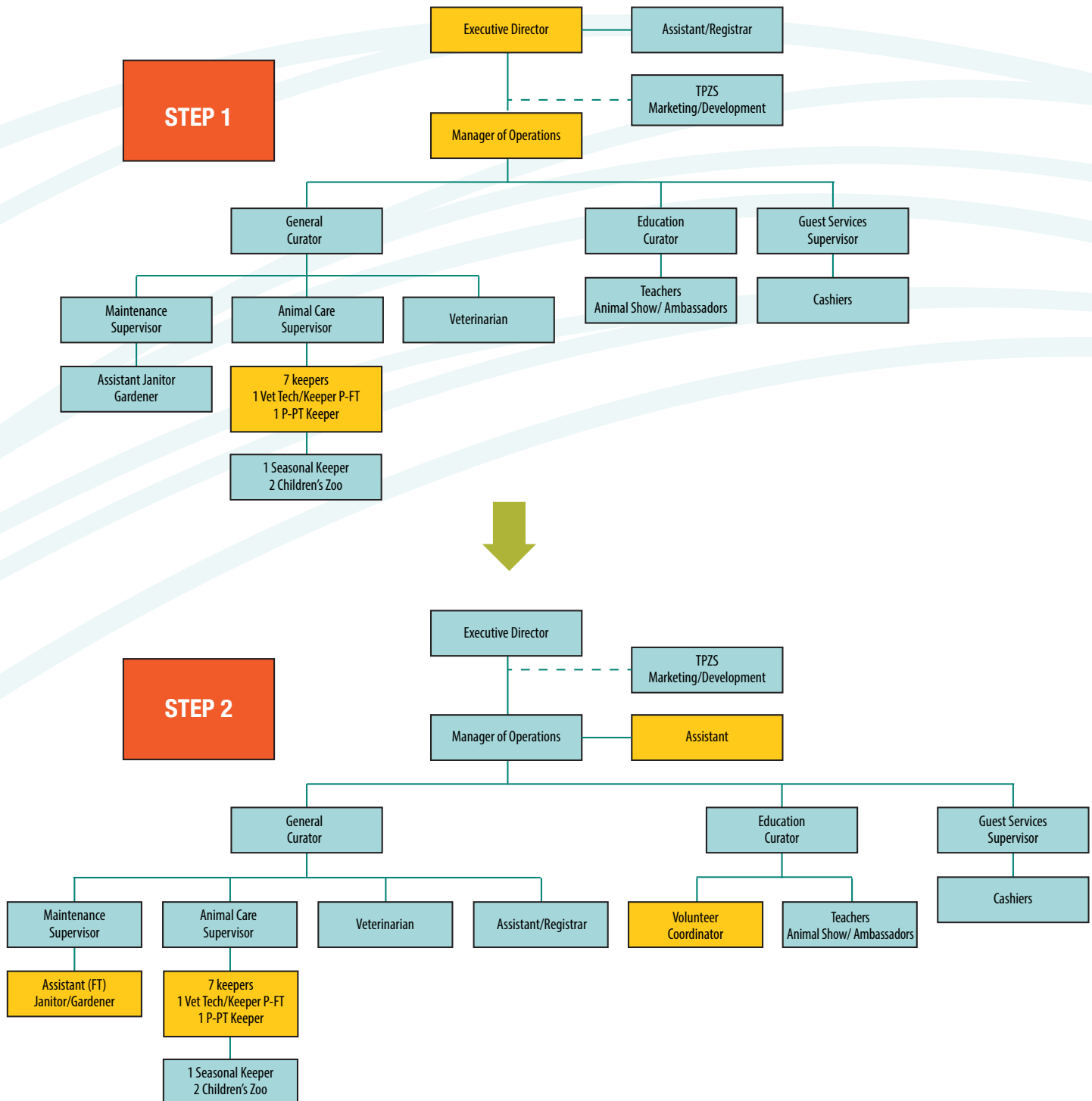


#### **Evaluate current staff positions, responsibilities, talents, and reorganize staff to achieve highest efficiency and productivity.**

Responsibilities for overseeing volunteers and marketing, and who has operational oversight over many aspects of the IFZ have become confusing. Important zoo functions have suffered as a result.



# IDAHO FALLS ZOO AT TAUTPHAUS PARK ORGANIZATIONAL CHART August 2016







#### Implement staffing plan.

Other staff deficiencies are apparent. The CRC, for example, recommended to,

“Fund additional maintenance resources. The zoo has many old structures, facilities, and equipment that are in need of constant maintenance and repair. In the off-season, the IFZ is without a maintenance employee over 30% of the time.” In addition CRC recommended to, “Hire an additional education staff member. The one full-time Curator of Education is currently doing two jobs: education and marketing. As education is one of the primary missions of the zoo, it should be staffed appropriately.”

A staffing plan should be developed that includes the recommended size of staff and the steps recommended to reaching that staffing level. This plan will be modified as staff evaluations and reorganization efforts offer new insight into the most efficient staff size and organization.



#### Develop long-term plan for the continued provision of veterinary services.

As the current contracted veterinarian considers retirement, the IFZ must begin a plan for seamless succession of veterinary services.



#### Increase team work and inter-staff communications.

Evaluate and reorganize meeting schedules and agendas, and provide opportunities to increase morale and staff unification.



#### Provide an increase in professional development opportunities.

As expressed in the latest AZA Accreditation Commission Report, “The level of support for professional development seems borderline at best.” Caring for a diverse collection of exotic animals requires specialized and very technical training. Continued professional development is needed.





## Improve staff facilities and working conditions.

Access to appropriate work space, equipment, and technology are woefully inadequate. The Mayor's Citizen Review Committee report concluded:

"The office space for staff is woefully inadequate. The current office space for the six keepers is only 120 square feet! Computer equipment is beyond inadequate. Work space for the educator and her seasonal staff is very cramped, with little or no storage. Up to four employees occupy an office space of only 180 square feet in a building built in the 1930s."

The most recent AZA accreditation review reported,

"Keepers can only access the internet for email by using an office employee's station. A computer station located where the keepers gather should be considered when that area is renovated."



## Increase important record keeping capabilities with the purchase of ipads and appropriate software.

Required record keeping for the zoo collection, animal enrichment, veterinary care, medications, animal transactions, feeding, cleaning, and much more are important but extremely time consuming. The purchase of ipads with appropriate software would make record keeping more accurate and much more efficient. Staff will carry ipads with them as they do their daily tasks and conveniently include the appropriate information as they go about their daily duties.

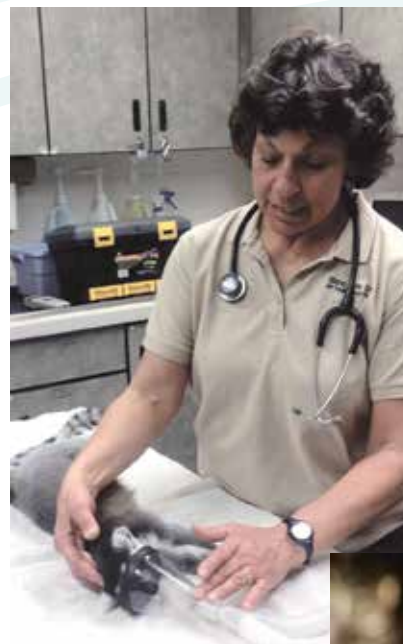


## Maximize volunteer support of staff duties by optimizing city volunteer management coordination resources, reorganizing volunteer program, and increasing volunteer appreciation.

The impact volunteers have could be increased by reorganizing and clarifying volunteer organization and management. The CRC concluded,

"To optimize the contributions of volunteers, a planned, concerted effort is needed."

In addition, zoo volunteers currently do not receive the recognition and thanks from zoo staff that reflects their major contributions to the IFZ. Increasing volunteer appreciation is deserved and would strengthen the volunteer program.





## Objective 2 Strengthen and Maintain Exceptional Animal Care

While the animals at the IFZ are very well cared for, recent USDA inspections have highlighted the need to refocus and reevaluate animal care.

### Recommendations



**Develop and implement a staff-driven self inspection routine that results in optimum preparation for USDA inspections.**

Being well-prepared at all times for inspections should be among the highest of priorities for the IFZ in the coming months and years.



**Develop and implement a calendar of actions required for the best possible preparation for the 2019 AZA accreditation review.**

The next AZA review will be in 2019. Early preparation for this review will help ensure continuation of AZA accreditation and the highest-quality animal care.



**Investigate and obtain the appropriate power generators needed to supply the electricity required for security, animal care and safety at IFZ during times of power outages.**

Recent power outages have emphasized the need for back-up power generation at IFZ. Temperature extremes, security, and increased possibility of animal escapes cannot be appropriately managed without electricity.

## Objective 3 Strengthen and Grow the IFZ's Financial Infrastructure

To adequately take advantage of opportunities to grow and improve, the ability of the IFZ to generate and manage additional income needs to be greatly magnified.

### Recommendations



**Rebuild an active and productive fundraising program.**

Fundraising at the zoo has been neglected. A high, immediate priority for the zoo must be to develop and maintain an effective fundraising infrastructure. This will include substantially increasing the visibility of the zoo in the community and beyond, development of fundraising materials, evaluation and restructuring sponsor and donor recognition, development of an active grant writing program, evaluation of fundraising events, the establishment of relationships with potential donors, sponsors, and foundations and significantly improving communications with zoo supporters, identifying foundations and more.



**Evaluate, develop, maintain, and appropriately manage additional income producing activities at the zoo.**

The zoo needs to investigate concessions at other zoos to determine if IFZ concessions are performing optimally. A thorough review of the financial productivity of all zoo income generating activities with an investigation of industry standards would provide a good understanding of the income producing potential of the zoo and how to take full advantage of that potential.



### **Improve communication with the TPZS and explore together future development.**

The Tautphaus Park Zoological Society (TPZS) is a major asset to the IFZ providing a 501(c)3 not-for-profit support organization for the zoo. Over the years, various leadership styles and personalities of zoo administrators, changes in zoo leadership and lack of appropriate communication between the zoo and TPZS has decreased the potency of this critical partnership. Zoo administration should work hard to strengthen the relationship with this valuable zoo asset. In addition, zoo administration and the TPZS leadership should explore together similar societies at other zoos, determine the most productive future of development for the TPZS and develop a plan to increase the capabilities of this valuable zoo asset.



### **Improve communication with City of Idaho Falls elected officials.**

Communication between the zoo and city government has been poor. The AZA accreditation review noted that: “improving communication between the governing authority and zoo staff should be made a priority.”



## **Objective 4**

### **Have a Dynamic Vision for the Future and a Clear Plan to Fulfill that Vision.**

**A meaningful plan to guide daily operations and decisions is imperative for the success of any organization including the IFZ.**

The AZA Accreditation Commission report states that,

“A strategic plan to ensure that growth is coordinated and can be supported financially and with man power is very important. The zoo could benefit from overall master and strategic plans” and recommends the zoo “chart a course for program development, capacity-building of staff and use of physical assets.”

## **Recommendations**



### **Completion of Tautphaus Park Master Plan is required before further zoo planning is possible.**

Many of the important questions about the zoo’s abilities and limitations for the future will be answered with the completion of this master plan including land available for zoo expansion, parking and zoo entrance location.



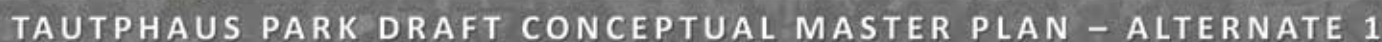
### **Develop and adopt a new Idaho Falls Zoo Master Plan.**

The current Master Plan for the IFZ was developed 18 years ago in 1998. Many of the issues and actions presented in this Five-Year Plan require a new master plan in order to be fulfilled. Improvements in exhibits, education, staff workspace, parking, visitor services and others cannot be adequately addressed without a new IF Zoo Master Plan.



The zoo could increase its financial infrastructure by better anticipating expenses and revenues each year. This could be accomplished by development of a Five-Year Pro Forma Budget. Past budgets and information gathered on potential additional income sources (see above) could be used to predict out five years.

**The progress, effectiveness and practicality of the Five-Year Plan needs to be reevaluated every year and adaptively managed as needed.**







## AREA OF PRIORITY 2

# IMPROVE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The single-most powerful way to increase ticket and concessions income and magnify the educational potency of IFZ is to improve the experience visitors have at the zoo.



## Area of Priority 2. Improve Visitor Experience

### Objective 1 Improving Visitor Experience by Improving Exhibits

As reviewed in the general findings section of this report, visitors feel the exhibits are stale, in disrepair, and in need of change. New exhibits, changing exhibits, upgraded exhibits, anything new is by far the most clear message from patron's comments. In recent reviews, the AZA cited significant limitations to exhibits and that a review of exhibits is needed "to stay in step with modern zoological practice."

### Recommendations



#### Inventory existing exhibits and produce a prioritized list of repairs and replacements.

To provide a dynamic zoo experience, the repair and replacement of exhibits must be a consistent and ongoing activity at the zoo. This information must be gathered in conjunction with the development of a new IFZ Master Plan.



#### Develop prioritized list of potential new exhibits and animals.

In conjunction with the development of a new IFZ Master Plan, the zoo needs to determine the potential new exhibits and new animals and their impact on educational layout of exhibits, visitor experience, conservation efforts and animal care.



#### Explore potential for annual temporary exhibits.

As seen in other tourist attractions/nonprofit organizations, seasonal or temporary exhibits are a key to bringing in visitors, both to encourage regular return visitation from community members and to attract tourists from the region and off the interstate. The ability to bring in unique animals for seasonal exhibits should be included in all exhibit planning.

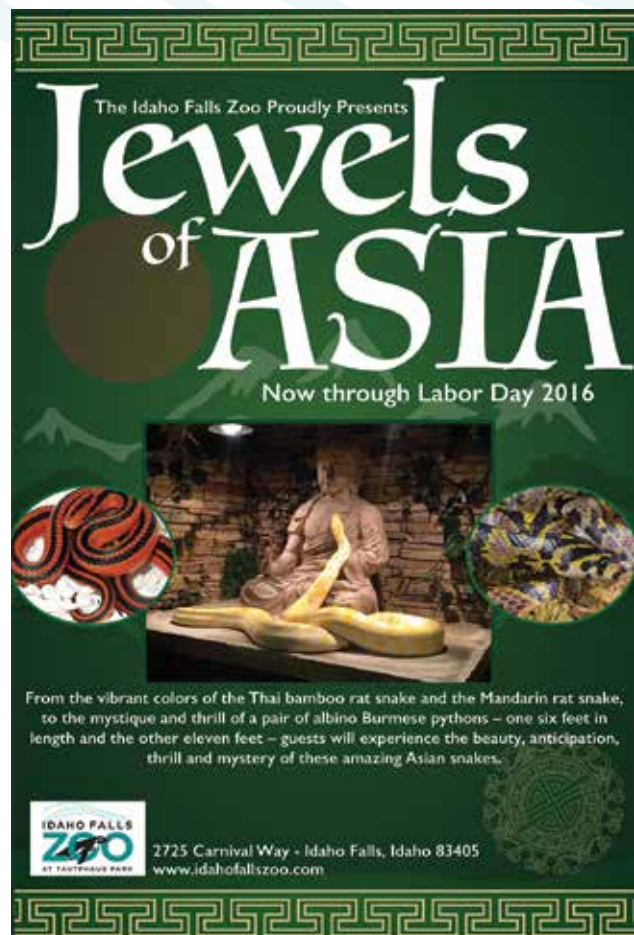


#### Explore potential of adding an aquarium as part of the IFZ experience.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has recently been approached by a group interested in developing an aquarium in the Idaho Falls area. Recently developed aquariums in Salt Lake City and Boise indicate the interest in these facilities. IFZ should explore the potential, costs, and business model of including an aquarium at the IFZ. This exploration should be included in the development of the new IFZ Master plan.



#### All exhibit improvements and additions must be planned and implemented with associated staff and administrative support needs considered and fulfilled.



... seasonal or temporary exhibits are  
a key to bringing in visitors ...

## Objective 2

### Improving Visitor Experience by Providing Interactive, Entertaining and Educational Experiences

Zoo visitors currently do not see the IFZ as a place to have dynamic and entertaining interactive experiences with the animals housed there.

Patrons rank educational value of the zoo low. Only 36% gave the IFZ an excellent ranking in “Educational Value” and only 35% in “Increasing conservation awareness.” When asked to choose from several potential reasons for coming to the zoo, only 1% chose “To learn about animals.”

### Recommendations



#### 1 Increase the quantity and quality of interactive, educational experiences available for daily visitors.

Increasing the availability and impact of daily educational interactions with visitors is the single-best way to increase educational potency and visitor experience. Frequent daily opportunities to directly interact with and learn about the animals during a normal visit to the zoo is a great opportunity to provide a dynamic and entertaining experience at the zoo.



#### 2 Evaluate resources available for education and determine the short-term allocation of those resources towards daily visitor experience versus formal educational programs.



#### 3 Improve educational programs according to findings of educational resource evaluation.

Educational classes, camps, and programs offer an excellent opportunity for education about and close-up interaction with the zoo and animals. While these types of educational programs are currently improving under the new Education Curator, long-standing educational programs have been on the decline in quality over the previous years. The AZA accreditation review stated:





“Strategic goals and objectives are not addressed in the education plan, although messages and programs are mentioned, and educational programming is written to meet Idaho state science standards. The Education Curator acknowledges that regular analytical program assessment needs to be a higher priority.”



#### Improve physical facilities for education.

The physical facilities available for educational programs at the zoo are currently grossly inadequate. These include the Education Center where classes are held, storage for educational materials, and housing for educational animals. Current facilities are inadequate for existing programs and severely limit potential for improvement of educational programs. According to the AZA accreditation review:

“The room the program animals are housed in is quite small and appears to limit the amount of animals used for programming. The institution should consider removing storage of non-animal items in this room, which could free up valuable space and allow for more diversity and rotation of the program animals. Species diversity and animals available might be minimal to achieve the zoo’s education goals.”



#### Reevaluate the stage where the Animal Interaction Programs are held.

The current placement of this stage is limited for its purpose being placed right next to a busy public street. The current physical footprint limits the zoo’s ability to appropriately provide important daily educational encounters with animals. The stage for animal shows for example, takes space that the zoo does not have. Consideration of the repair, expansion, or replacement of the Education Center and the replacement of the stage should be included in the new IFZ Master Plan.



Patrons rank educational value of the zoo low. Only 36% gave the IFZ an excellent ranking in “Educational Value”.



#### Include in staffing plan a full-time education assistant (see Area of Priority 1).

The CRC, for example, recommended to,

“Hire an additional education staff member. The one full-time Curator of Education is currently doing two jobs: education and marketing. As education is one of the primary missions of the zoo, education should be staffed appropriately.”



## Objective 3

### Improving Visitor Experience by Improving Visitor Services

**IFZ visitor services are frequently mentioned as less than optimal by visitors, staff, and zoo supporters in patron surveys and interviews.**

The infrastructure needed to adequately receive visitors and make sure they have a meaningful experience is an important issue on everyone's mind. The general feeling is that the zoo currently does not have the infrastructure to adequately deal with visitors.

When patrons were asked to write responses to the following general questions:

“What do you dislike the most about the Idaho Falls Zoo?” and “How could the Idaho Falls Zoo be improved?”

29% of respondents wrote a comment associated with visitor services.

## Recommendations



**Inventory and evaluate current visitor services and explore potential additional visitor services.**

The most-frequently mentioned visitor services that are mentioned by visitors as needing improvement in order of frequency are: concessions, bathrooms, parking, gift shop, playground, entrance, benches, drinking fountains, classrooms, water misters, better map, and a splash pad.

Most mentioned visitor service in need of improvement by staff include: lack of parking, inadequate education center, poor entrance, poor exit, and the aged and substandard zoo shop. Other issues mentioned include signage and way-finding, new show area and stage for education and restrooms. Also a general consideration for keeping visitors in the zoo longer and additional revenue-generating opportunities.





The zoo needs to evaluate current and potential visitor services at the zoo and prioritize visitor services to be improved/added. The information should be included in the new IFZ Master Plan. These considerations should include: overall zoo layout, visitor movement and flow, zoo entrance and exit/store, pathways, restrooms, food concessions, family/kid-friendly amenities like playgrounds, handicapped access and accessing steep grades in zoo, availability of visitor accommodations like strollers, wheelchairs, first aid, education center, signage, stage.



### **Implement zoo specific recommendations from 2013 City of Idaho Falls Food and Beverage Analysis.**

In 2013 an analysis of city food concessions was prepared by Profitable Food Facilities. This analysis included a section on IFZ. Many of the results and recommendations have not been implemented.



### **Special emphasis should be placed on the improvement of parking.**

The AZA accreditation review identified the presence of only 80 parking spaces (that are shared with the ice arena) for a facility with an annual attendance which exceeds 123,000, and no bus parking for school or other groups as a “serious issue.” In interviews with zoo staff, volunteers, and supporters, parking was consistently brought up as a limitation at IFZ. Finally, in surveys of zoo visitors, parking received the second-lowest score of zoo attributes.



### **Special emphasis should be placed on income-generating services like food concessions.**

When asked to rank various attributes at the IFZ, food concessions received the single lowest score with only 23% of respondents giving food concessions an excellent rating. The zoo needs to investigate food concessions and other money generating activities at other zoos to determine if IFZ concessions are performing as expected or could be expanded or altered. In addition, the zoo should investigate new potential concessions by exploring successful offerings at other zoos.

## **Objective 4**

### **Improve visitor experience by improving customer service**

**A strong culture of excellent customer service is critical to improving visitor experience.**

In addition, the Mayor of Idaho Falls has recently set a city-wide goal for improvement in customer service. The zoo should work hard to develop a strong, positive customer service culture among all zoo staff and volunteers and provide regular customer service training for zoo staff and volunteers.

### **Recommendations**



**Develop training programs and set clear expectations for staff.**



**Implement regular evaluation of staff and a yearly survey of zoo visitors to measure the level of customer service excellence.**



**Continue and enhance the Parks and Recreation Department’s “Secret Shopper” program to regularly investigate the quality of customer service at the IFZ.**





AREA OF PRIORITY 3  
**CONSERVATION**

Turn the connection generated between visitors and animals into conservation action



## Area of Priority 3. Conservation

*Conservation is key to the mission of the IFZ and an important vehicle for visitor engagement and education.*

While the IFZ is very successfully involved with Species Survival Programs (SSP) and has recently begun a Quarters for Conservation program, conservation efforts can be improved.

Staff and those associated with the zoo all agree that the potential for improvement is large. In addition, while patrons enjoy the animals, they have little opportunity to make meaningful emotional connections with them and/or become educated about the conservation challenges these species face. As a result, they do not currently see the zoo as a place to understand the conservation issues associated with the animals. Neither are they generally inspired in any way to take action on behalf of the world's wildlife.

Staff and those associated with the zoo all agree that the potential for improvement is large.

When asked to rank various attributes at the IFZ, attributes related to conservation received lower scores. Only 35% of patrons surveyed gave the IFZ an excellent ranking in "Increasing Conservation Awareness." When asked directly "How would you agree and disagree with the following statement, "The IFZ assists in conservation of endangered animals," a surprisingly low percentage of patrons strongly agreed, 52%. This score compares to 75% and 73% strongly agree when asked about the zoo is "a fun place to see animals" or "is a fun place to go with family and friends." Although successful SSPs are important conservation efforts that the zoo is engaged in and all the staff are very proud of, visitors seem generally unaware of these efforts.

The AZA accreditation commission report states: "The zoo's ongoing conservation projects are listed, rather than including strategic goals and objectives. Additionally, some actions and responsibilities listed were taken more than five years ago. Likewise, no evaluation of quantifiable success or impact of conservation donations or activity is done."



## Objective 1

### Include a conservation message in all educational efforts

#### Recommendations



**A conservation message should be a part of every educational effort and offering.**

Educational programs, daily educational offerings for visitors, signage, and public outreach are all excellent opportunities to educate the public about the conservation challenges faced by the world's wildlife. The zoo should strive to include conservation awareness in all zoo education, signage, and public outreach efforts.



**Better inform the public on Species Survival Programs (SSP) and other zoo conservation efforts through the media and in zoo educational offerings.**

Staff and well-informed zoo supporters are very proud of the zoo's involvement and success with SSPs. Visitors, however, are not well informed about this important zoo effort. The zoo should better educate zoo visitors and public about the zoo's conservation efforts, particularly the SSPs and impact of the Quarters for Conservation program.



## Objective 2

### Increase zoo conservation impact and efforts

#### Recommendations



**Increased SSP efforts should be central to exhibit planning and new IFZ Master Plan.**

Currently, the IFZ maintains more than 40 species managed under a SSP. The AZA accreditation review states that, "The zoo is very active and effective in a variety of conservation efforts." The zoo has the opportunity to expand those efforts. Exploration of IFZ exhibit improvement associated with the development of a new IFZ Master Plan provides an excellent opportunity to explore and identify new SSP programs that the zoo can be involved in.



**Increase support for and collaboration with conservation projects outside of the zoo.**

The zoo should actively seek opportunities to be involved with and support local, regional, and international conservation efforts. The zoo should actively pursue relationships with governmental and conservation agencies and discuss the active involvement of the zoo in conservation efforts.



**Increase efforts to raise funds for conservation projects.**

The IFZ is currently actively involved in raising funds for conservation efforts that are local and international. For example, the new Quarters for Conservation program has begun a second season. The zoo should evaluate their support for conservation action and expand and adjust these efforts.





### Objective 3

## Develop in-house recycling and resource conservation programs

The IFZ should be an example to all of thoughtful stewardship over the earth's limited resources.

### Recommendations



#### Increase recycling in the zoo.

Staff and zoo supporters feel that the zoo could improve its efforts in recycling, using recyclable items in its concessions and better educate visitors on zoo recycling and conservation efforts. Zoo staff should evaluate the potential for providing opportunities for zoo staff and visitors to conserve resources and recycle. This could include biodegradable plates, utensils, and other items at the food concession, on-site composting for zoo landscaping, recycling bins, no print receipts and more.



#### Complete IF Zoo water conservation project.

Much of the zoo was built when conservation of water resources was not an issue to be considered. As a result, much of the zoo's water use is extremely wasteful. The AZA Accreditation Review stated that "all pools and aquatic exhibits (notably otter and penguin) are dumped and refilled more often than weekly during the summer season. Reduction of the number of times water is removed from penguin and otter exhibits in the summer is not an option. The institution should consider long-term solutions in the master plan." The zoo has collaborated with the City of Idaho Falls Water Department, has identified all areas where water use can be limited, and is actively working to complete this water conservation project. The zoo needs to continue to evaluate water usage and optimize every opportunity to conserve water.



#### Explore the possibility of becoming a no waste facility, conduct a thorough energy audit and implement appropriate adjustments to maximize energy conservation.

**The zoo needs to continue to evaluate water usage and optimize every opportunity to conserve water.**







AREA OF PRIORITY 4

## **BROADEN THE REACH**

The zoo is well-attended. However, the zoo has the potential to significantly increase attendance and broaden the demographic diversity of zoo patrons.



## Area of Priority 4. Broaden the Reach

*The zoo is well-attended (see general results). However, the IFZ has the potential to significantly increase attendance and broaden the demographic diversity of zoo patrons. Increasing annual attendance would have a significant impact on mission fulfillment, financial viability, ability to successfully address the other areas of priority identified in this plan, and increase the impact the zoo has on the local economy.*

### Objective 1 Increase the Visibility of the Idaho Falls Zoo

#### Recommendations



#### Develop marketing plan based on the Market Study and build an aggressive and sustainable marketing program.

Zoo staff, volunteers and supporters almost universally mention the lack of appropriate marketing as something that needs to be drastically improved in both traditional marketing and its use of digital/social media. Years of little focus on marketing efforts have resulted in a current marketing effort that generally performs poorly (see Market Report Appendix B). In 2015, marketing efforts did increase which is reflected in high numbers of visitors seeing marketing, but is not yet highly effective. The Market Report needs to be used to develop a new Marketing Plan and the zoo's marketing efforts needs to dramatically increase. This should be a high priority effort for the zoo.



#### Clarify staff marketing responsibilities.

Current zoo staff organization leaves marketing responsibilities vague. While the position of Education Curator currently performs marketing responsibilities as limited time allows, the lack of clarity allows things to fall between the cracks and marketing efforts remain limited. This is magnified by the fact the zoo already operates with fewer than optimum staff. Marketing efforts will not improve dramatically until responsibilities are clarified and staff time is made available for marketing efforts.



#### Establish a meaningful marketing budget.

A limited marketing budget has been a major constraint to develop a meaningful marketing effort. All options need to be explored (annual budget, sponsorships, TPZS, etc.) to determine the potential of developing a meaningful marketing budget.



#### Better utilize and coordinate with marketing resources and staff in the Department of Parks and Recreation, Mayor's office, TPZS.

Between the City of Idaho Falls, the Department of Parks and Recreation, zoo sponsors, and the Tautphaus Park Zoological Society there are various policies, resources, potential resources to be developed, and marketing limitations. These potentials, resources, policies and limitations need to be thoroughly understood and the marketing and PR arms of the various organizations need to be coordinated to everyone's satisfaction. This includes the IF Zoo's ability to establish an independent digital marketing and social media presence.





## Increase Community Interaction.

Other organizations in Idaho Falls are confronting similar challenges to market their facilities across the region and beyond. These include the Museum of Idaho, Willard Art Center, Artitorium, Art Museum of Eastern Idaho and others. This limitation in resources actually provides the opportunity for collaboration that maximizes limited budgets and staff. The zoo needs to identify coordinated marketing potentials and determine the willingness and feasibility for marketing collaborations with other organizations.

Word of mouth is by far the most effective marketing tool. The more positive interaction the zoo has with the community, the more visible it will be thereby increasing the community “buzz” about the zoo. When the zoo does get out into the community, the response is extremely positive. Significantly increasing these efforts would greatly increase the zoo’s visibility, support and magnify increased marketing efforts and increase attendance.

Volunteers are currently active in community outreach through the Zoo Mobile and other efforts. With the increase of these efforts, zoo visibility in the community will also increase.

Volunteers are currently active in community outreach through the Zoo Mobile and other efforts.



Should the zoo be Open Year Round?



## Objective 2 Improve Access to the Zoo

### Recommendations



### Conduct feasibility study for increased public hours and/or a year-round zoo.

The amount of time the public has access to the IFZ is very restricted. The zoo is only open approximately six (6) months. During the limited number of months that the zoo is open to the public, it is often closed in the evenings. When asked directly “Should the zoo be Open Year Round?” two-thirds of visitors surveyed said, “Yes” (Yes 63%, No 37%).

The zoo should complete an in-house feasibility study on increasing hours per week and months per year that the zoo is open to the public. The study should consider staff availability, safety, maintenance, cost, and projected income. The zoo should also include the possibility of becoming open to the public year-round in the new IFZ Master Plan by exploring more inside exhibits and climate-appropriate animals.



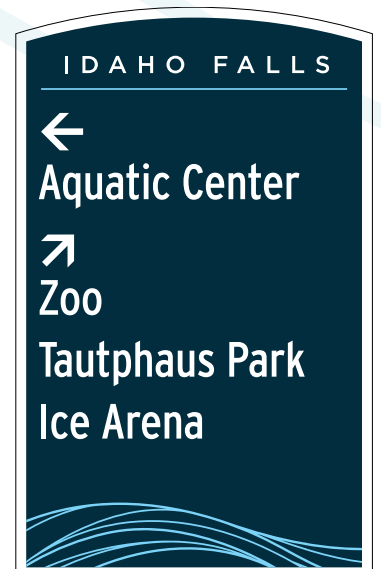


## Complete and implement the new way-finding signage plan with associated staff training.

The IFZ is located in the largest and most well-known park in Idaho Falls, Tautphaus Park. Regional visitors and tourists, however, are not familiar with Idaho Falls and do not know anything about Tautphaus Park. After having been made aware of the IFZ, being able to find the zoo is an important access issue for regional and traditional tourists. The Department of Parks and Recreation is currently implementing a new extensive city wide way-finding project. Completion of this project is important to the growth of visitors to the IFZ.



The Department of Parks and Recreation is currently implementing a new city-wide extensive way-finding project.





### Plains Zebra

*Equus quagga*

- Social. Lives in large herds
- Stands up to five feet tall and weighs around 800 pounds
- Striped pattern makes it hard for predators to distinguish individuals in herd
- Lifespan averages 20 years in the wild and 30 in captivity

**Breeding:** Family groups consist of a single male (stallion) and several females (mares) and their young (foals). Mares give birth to a single foal after a 340-390 day gestation period. Foals can run within an hour of birth. Mothers are very protective of young.

**Conservation:** Plains zebras are abundant in Africa, although the populations are regionally declining due to habitat loss and over-hunting. Zebras breed well in captivity.

**Wild Diet:** Grasses  
**Zoo Diet:** Hay

**Fun Fact:** Just like a human fingerprint, each zebra has a unique pattern of stripes which can be used to identify individuals.





## AREA OF PRIORITY 5

# MAINTAIN THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ZOO

The zoo must protect and maintain its natural atmosphere that is so attractive to current visitors and adds so much to the IFZ experience.



## Area of Priority 5. Maintain the Current Atmosphere and Accessibility of the Zoo

*As discussed in the General Findings, visitor surveys reveal that the beautiful, shady, well-maintained, comfortable, easily-accessible, family friendly-atmosphere of the IFZ is a major draw for the current base of visitors. Interviews with staff, volunteers, and supporters reinforce the fact that the IFZ atmosphere is a major asset. The zoo must protect and maintain its natural atmosphere that is so attractive to current visitors and adds so much to the IFZ experience.*

### Objective 1 Preserve and protect zoo atmosphere and grounds in all planning and improvement efforts.

#### Recommendations



Have zoo atmosphere central to all maintenance, grounds, daily operations and central to the development of new Idaho Falls Zoo Master Plan.

### Objective 2 Improve the zoo's maintenance and grounds keeping capabilities

#### Recommendations



Develop a planned maintenance-management plan and budget.

Buildings, exhibits and systems need to be on a budgeted, scheduled maintenance program that



allows for preventative maintenance well before major breakdowns happen that require very expensive emergency repairs (similar to the city's MERF account).

**Explore the development of a Zoo Capital Improvement Fund or more aggressive participation in the Parks Capital Improvement Fund.**

An increase in admission costs by \$0.50 per ticket would provide significant funds for maintenance, facility improvements, and construction of new exhibits and facilities. Currently, the Department of Parks and Recreation maintains such a fund that includes zoo-generated funds. The zoo should explore collecting additional admission funds and participating more aggressively in this fund or develop an independent Capital Improvement Fund.



**Explore the use of low-maintenance materials in all future construction projects and renovations (plastic lumber, vinyl window frames, stone, cement, redwood etc. Remove/replace painted surfaces.**



**Include in staffing plan an upgrade from a seasonal maintenance assistant to a full-time maintenance assistant**

The CRC recommended to "Fund additional maintenance resources. The Zoo has many old structures, facilities, and equipment that are in need of constant maintenance and repair. In the off season, the zoo is without a maintenance employee over 30% of the time."



## CONCLUSION



## Conclusion

This Five-year Strategic Plan focuses on five broad areas of improvement:

1. Strengthening the organizational foundation of the zoo
2. Improving the visitor experience
3. Conservation and
4. Increasing attendance. Additionally, the plan insists that while these improvements are implemented that special attention is focused on
5. Maintaining the current atmosphere and accessibility that has brought the current success enjoyed by the IFZ.

The objectives and recommendations proposed within each of these broad Areas of Priority provide a clear path for the IFZ to increase its financial viability, and value as an educational and recreational asset, impact on the local economy and magnify its ability to inspire active participation in creating a healthy future for wildlife. The IFZ at Tautphaus Park is a beloved community amenity that enjoys healthy attendance and maintains a well cared for collection of animals. In order to simply maintain the current operations and programs, significant improvements are needed to the organizational infrastructure of the zoo. These improvements also provide the opportunity to significantly improve the financial viability of the zoo and greatly magnify educational and economic impact.

Some of the recommendations in this report require additional investment by the City. In particular, increased support for zoo staff is a critical element of this Five-Year Strategic Plan. These investments are key to the IFZ increasing ticket revenues, development of additional revenue streams, development of meaningful fund-raising efforts and ability to successfully market the zoo all of which leads to increased revenue from non-city sources.

In addition, a large part of the Five-Year Plan is dependent upon the city's approval of a Tautphaus Park Master Plan. The development of its own new Master Plan is a critical next step for the zoo. Issues that are important to the successful implementation of the Five-Year Strategic Plan (e.g. facility improvements, staff working conditions, educational programs, exhibit improvement and availability of visitor services) will be addressed in a new IFZ Master Plan but cannot be adequately addressed until the amount of space available to the zoo to address these considerations is determined. The approval of a Tautphaus Park Master Plan is required for the IFZ to begin making any meaningful plans for the future.

Only 30 years ago, the IFZ was under extreme public criticism and in danger of being closed down forever due to declining zoo facilities and poor care for the animals. Because of the determination and investment by the City of Idaho Falls, zoo staff and volunteers, and contributions from donations, IFZ is currently a beloved community amenity and among the most highly attended amenities in the region. The significant impact the zoo has had on the cultural, educational, recreational, and economic fabric of Idaho Falls over the decades is difficult to measure. This hard work and investment has placed the IFZ in a position to greatly magnify its impact on the City of Idaho Falls and across the region. This Five-Year Plan provides a practical guide to the begin the fulfillment of this bright and impactful future for the Idaho Falls Zoo at Tautphaus Park.



